

# Character Builder 您好學? 呀

The basic unit of the Chinese language is the *zi* (字), i.e. a Chinese word. Each *zi* has a written form (called a character, made up of strokes), a sound (made up of consonant and vowel) and a meaning (or multiple meanings). When we speak or write Chinese, we string *zi* together to form terms, phrases and sentences.

In Putonghua (the spoken form of Modern Standard Chinese) each *zi* is pronounced in one of four tones:

1<sup>st</sup> tone: 1 = diacritical mark — pitch: 5 to 5, highest prolonged

2<sup>nd</sup> tone: 2 = diacritical mark / pitch: 3 to 5, middle to high

3<sup>rd</sup> tone: 3 = diacritical mark U pitch: 2 to 1 to 4, low to lowest to high

4<sup>th</sup> tone: 4 = diacritical mark \ pitch: 5 to 1, highest to lowest)

To pronounce each *zi* below, follow its pinyin and the given tone number. Light-sound words, which have no definite pitch, carry no diacritical mark and are marked by 0.

This week: Words about vacation and retirement



Putonghua pronunciation: *guan1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *gwaan1*

Meaning: shut, close, obstacle, block, imprison, mountain pass, entry-exit point, link

關 (radical 門 *men2*, door) means pass/block: 關口 (*guan1 kou3* = mountain-pass-opening/gate or critical juncture), 關卡 (*guan1 ka3* = border-pass-block = border check-point/customs). Verb 關 means shut/close: 關窗 (*guan1 chuang1* = shut-window), 關門 (*guan1 men2* = shut-door or close down business/organization), 關機 (*guan1 ji1* = shut-down-machine/computer). 關係 (*guan1 xi4* = join-link) means relationship/contacts between things/people. Businessman 拉關係 (*la1 guan1 xi4* = pull-contacts/links/strings = exploits social “*guanxi*”), so proposal 過關 (*guo4 guan1* = go-through-pass = gets through/approved). Team works overnight to 闖關 (*chuang3 guan1* = charge-guarded-mountain-pass = try achieve significant breakthrough). Leaders show 關心 (*guan1 xin1* = link-heart = concern). Vacationer shrugs duty: “與我無關!” (*yü2 wo3 wu2 guan1* = with-me-none-relationship = “I ain’t involved!”)

by Diana Yue